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ABSTRACT

This curriculum unit is designed to teach students how the Holocaust differed in Hungary, what conditions were like at the largest extermination camp (Auschwitz-Birkenau), and about people who risked their lives to save Hungarian and Polish Jews. The unit notes that students should already be acquainted with the rise of anti-Semitism in Germany and the progression of the Holocaust in countries captured by the Nazis early in World War 2, in particular, Poland. Strategies for teaching the unit include slide presentations, individual and cooperative student presentations, discussion questions, lectures, and assessment questions. The unit is comprised of the following three lessons: (1) "Background of Holocaust in Hungary"; (2) "Conditions in Auschwitz"; and (3) "Common People Who Made a Difference, Heroes of the Holocaust in Poland and Hungary." (BT)

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The Tragedies and Heroes of the Holocaust in Poland and Hungary

Submitted to the US-Polish Fulbright Commission

by Christy Schirmer

Objectives: By the end of the unit, students should understand how the Holocaust differed in Hungary, what conditions were like at the largest extermination camp, Auschwitz-Birkenau, and about people who risked their lives to save Hungarian and Polish Jews.

Strategies: slide presentations, individual and cooperative student presentations, discussion questions, lectures, assessment questions.

Prior Knowledge Necessary: Students should already be acquainted with the rise of anti-Semitism in Germany and the progression of the Holocaust in countries captured by the Nazis early in World War II, in particular, Poland.

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Lesson One-Background of Holocaust in Hungary

The progression of the Holocaust in Hungary is quite different than of other countries such as Poland, the Netherlands, and France where the Nazis had invaded early in the war. In 1944, Hungary had the largest surviving Jewish population of any country in Europe. However, Hungary also became the country where the Holocaust proceeded most rapidly

After World War I, Hungary lost 2/3 of its land in the treaty of Trianon. From this point forward, its foreign policy aim was to retrieve this lost land. It became clear that the only nations which would support this goal were Italy and Germany. Although most Hungarians recognized that there were dangers in siding with Germany, the leaders thought that they could get their land back while only giving small concessions to the Nazis. One of the concessions was passing anti-Semitic laws. The Hungarians believed that if they passed some anti-Semitic legislation, they could avoid full control by the Nazis. In 1938, the first Jewish law was passed. This restricted Jewish presence in the careers of law, medicine, and civil service. Although there was a history of anti-Semitism in Hungary, particularly since the turn of the century, most anti-Semites supported allowing the Jews to emigrate from Hungary. However, by this time there were few options for the Jews. By 1941 most of Western Europe had been captured by the Nazis. Great Britain and the United States refused to raise quota levels even by 1942 when they were well informed of the persecution of the Jews by the Nazis.

Hungary remained neutral until 1941, refusing to attack Czechoslovakia or Yugoslavia. When Germany attacked the Soviet Union in 1941, Hungary was finally dragged into World War II. From this point on, persecution of the Jews proceeded. In 1941, anti-miscegenation laws were passed, however these laws were widely disregarded by Hungarian authorities. In 1942, the first Hungarian Jews were deported. Twenty thousand were handed over to the Nazis and unbeknownst to Hungary, 90% were executed. The prime minister was widely criticized after the war for aiding in the persecution of the Jewish population. However, he always claimed that his participation in the persecution of Jews actually saved lives. If he had refused to give in to Hitler's demands, he believed that Germany would have taken direct control of Hungary soon after the war began and Hungarian Jews would have been sent to the extermination camps much sooner. Because most could not survive in concentration camps for more than a year, he

asserts that had exportations begun sooner than 1944, none of the Hungarians would have lived. This is still a historical debate.

In any case, the situation changed in March, 1944. Hungary realized that they were on the losing side of the war and approached the West to discuss a separate peace. Considering the Hungarians to be traitors and recognizing that he could not afford to lose such a strategic area, Hitler invaded in 1944. Although most of Hungary's Jews had been spared until 1944, by this time the Nazis had become extremely efficient at extermination. In the first six weeks of Nazi occupation 400,000 Hungarian Jews were deported. By June, most of Hungary's Jews had been sent to Auschwitz. International protests erupted and as a result, Prime Minister Horty refused to deport Jews from Budapest. Consequently, this is one of the few cities in Hungary which still has a Jewish community.

In October 1944, Horty made a desperate attempt to leave the war. In a radio address, he announced that the war for Hungary was over. A historically anti-Semitic group called *Arowcross* came to power. They introduced a reign of terror. They continued to deport Jews. They also led random killings of thousands of Jews in Budapest. One example of this was the shooting deaths of all of the patients in a Jewish hospital.

Other victims of anti-Semitism included Jews drafted into the work service. Jews were prohibited by law from carrying weapons; instead, those drafted were forced into manual labor for the army. They had the most deplorable living conditions and were forced to do difficult, dangerous work. However after the Nazi occupation, being in the work service was a lifeline for many Jewish men. Although they were treated brutally under Nazi occupation, because they were vital to the war effort, they were not eligible for exportation to the concentration camps.

The most well-known victim of the work service is Miklos Radnoti who became a well-known poet posthumously. He married the love of his life, Fanni. Although he had a teaching credential and a doctorate degree, he was not permitted to teach because he was Jewish. He was drafted into the work service and when the Nazis occupied Hungary, he was sent Serbia where he was forced to work mining copper and building roads. In October, 1944 the Germans evacuated Serbia and Radnoti's labor squad was driven in a forced march to northwest Hungary. There, with twenty-two others he was shot by guards and was buried in a mass grave at the side of a road. When his body was exhumed a notebook of bloodstained poems was found in his pocket. Here are a few of the poems found in this book.

Forced March

Collapsed exhausted, only a fool would rise again
to drag his knees and ankles once more like marching pain
yet press on as though wings were to lift him on his way.
Invited by that ditch but in vain, he'd day not stay. . .
ask him, why not? Maintaining his pace, he might reply,
he longs to meet the wife and a gentler death, that's why.
But he's insane, I tell you, because above the homes,
since we have left them, only a scorching whirlwind roams,
the walls are laid, the plumtree is broken, and the night
lurks there among the ruins in fearful, bristling plight.
Oh, if I could believe that all things for which I yearn
exist beyond my heart, that there's still home and return. . .
return! The old verandah, the peaceful hum of bees
attracted by the cooling fresh plum jam in the breeze,
the still, late summer sunshine, the garden drowsing mute,
among the leaves the swaying voluptuous naked fruit
and Fanni waiting for me, blond by the russet hedge,
while languidly in the morning re-draws the shadow's edge.
It may come true again, the moon shines so round, be wise!
Don't leave me, friend, shout at me, shout! And I will arise!

Bor,
September 15, 1944

A La Recherche

Intimate evenings, times long past, refined to remembrance,
glorious table, young poet-artists and pretty spouses
slowly you slide in the silent swamp where history ripens.
Warm summer night, when sparkling, noble wines animated sparks in noble minds,
dear friends, oh, where do we find you?

Verdant verbs climbed up to the lights, adventurous adverbs bounced on a crest of crisp anapaest in graceful abandon
and the dead were alive, the captives free, busy writing,
long disappeared dear friends, many known as fallen in action,
weighed down by heavy earth in Spain, Ruthenia, Flanders.

How many were, who just clenched their teeth, leapt into the fire,
soldiering purely because they could not see other options,
While the platoon lay under the foul sky fitfully sleeping,
they had a dream of that room back home, that warm, steady shelter,

their little island circled by society's ocean.

How many went in sealed, cattle-trucks like beast to the slaughter,
they had to stand there, frozen, unarmed, flung into the minefields,
they had a course down there, that war stood for liberation,
angel of freedom, you guard their great vision under the night sky.

How many. . . Leave it! Where do we find those intimate evenings?
Fragments of verse multiplied as the call-up notes were arriving and very soon a
few sorry wrinkles grew by the smiling
lips and eyes of those pretty spouses, whose sunny , sylph-like
steps have grown heavy in these silent, unhappy war-years.

Where do we find that night, that table under the lime tree?
And those men who may still be alive, that downtrodden army?
Their words beat in my heart, my hand holds there steady handshakes,
I recollect their lines, their shapes unfold to me slowly,
Serbia weeps and I analyze (caged, muted assessment).

Where do we find that night? That night cannot be recaptured,
death gives a new perspective again to the men who departed.
They sit among us, keeping warm in a soft, feminine smile,
taking a sip from our glass of wine who, unburied, unmarked
slumber in faraway silent woods and alien uplands.

The Seventh Ecologue

Evening approaches the barracks and the ferocious oak fence
braided with barbed wire, look, they dissolve in the twilight.
Slowly the eye thus abandons the bounds of our captivity and
only the mind, the mind is aware of the wire's tension.
Even fantasy finds no other path towards freedom.
Look, my beloved, dream that lovely liberator,
releases our aching bodies. The captives set out for home.

Clad in rags and snoring, with shaven heads, the prisoners
fly form Serbia's blinded peaks to there fugitive homelands.
Fugitive homeland! Oh, is there still such a place?
Still unharmed by bombs? As on the day we enlisted? And
will the groaning men to my right and my left return safely? And
is there a home where hexameters are appreciated?

Dimly groping line after line without punctuation,
here I write this poem as I live in the twilight;

inching, like bleary-eyed caterpillar, my way on the paper;
torches and books have been seized by the Lager guard,
mail has stopped and fog from the mountains muffles the barracks.
Riddled with insects and rumors her in the mountains, Frenchmen,
Poles, and dissident Serbs, loud Italians, dreamy Jews,
fevered, a dismembered body, we lead a single existence,
waiting for news, a sweet word from a woman, and decency, freedom,
waiting for miracles, guessing the end obscured by the darkness.

Lying on boards, I am a captive beast among vermin,
the fleas renew their seige but the flies at last retired.
Evening has come, my captivity, behold is curtailed by
a day and so is my life. The camp is asleep. The moonshine
lights up the land and highlights the taut barbed wire fence,
drawing the shadow of armed prison guards, observed through the window.
Walking, projected on walls, and spying the night's early noises.

Swish go the dreams, behold my beloved, the camp is asleep and the
odd man wakes with a snort turns about in his little space and
returns to his dreams at once, his face glowing. Alone I sit
up awake and with the lingering taste of a cigarette butt in my mouth instead of
your kiss, I get no merciful sleep, for
neither can I live nor die without you, my love, any longer

Lager,
Above Zagubica in the Mountains
July, 1944

Because exportation began so late in the war 150,000 Hungarian Jews survived the camps. However, Hungary is an example of the most efficient exportation of its Jewish community, exporting the majority of its Jewish community to Auschwitz in only seven months. At the end of the war, only about 150,000 members of the Jewish community survived.

Lesson Two: Conditions in Auschwitz

Instructions: First make sure students are familiar with the background information below. Then give each student one of the following primary source quotes. I suggest that while students read the quotes, they are shown slides of Auschwitz-Birknau. A good web site with graphics can be found at the Holocaust pictures exhibition at http://modb.oce.ulg.ac.be/schmitz/holocaust.html. In the book from which I have taken these quotes, there are many graphic pictures which could also be made into slides.

Swiebocki, Teresa and Henryk, eds. Auschwitz, Voices From the Ground. Panstwowe Muzeum Oswiecim-Brzezinka.

Background Information

The Nazis constructed many concentration camps, but the largest of all, the one that to most Jews is the everlasting symbol of the Holocaust is Auschwitz-Birkenau which lies about 45 minutes outside of Krakow in the city of Oswiecim, an important railway junction. Poles were the biggest non-Jewish group of victims killed, but as the war progressed, Jews and other prisoners from all Nazi occupied territory were sent here. Most of the deported Hungarian Jews and other prisoners and "racially impure" from all of the Nazi occupied territories were sent to Auschwitz. Prisoners were either condemned to slow death by hunger, exhausting work, or criminal experiments, or were condemned to a quick death as a result of individual and mass executions. Since 1942, Auschwitz became the biggest center for the mass extermination of Jews. The majority of Jews deported to Auschwitz were killed in gas chambers immediately on arrival, without registration and without identification with the camp numbers. Therefore it is very difficult to determine precisely the number of people murdered there, but most historians set the number around 1.5 million

Auschwitz was set up in 1940 for Polish citizens, especially for those the Nazi authorities considered dangerous and undesirable. These were mainly patriots, intellectuals and members of the resistance. The first transport of Poles arrived at the camp on June 14, 1940. The last was in the second half of 1944.

After 1941, as the Nazis conquered and occupied more countries, they began to deport citizens of other nations to the concentration camp. In 1941, the SS chiefs began to extend the premises. The existing camp became the mother camp of the

whole network of new camps. It was called Auschwitz I. In the village of Brzezinka, three kilometers away the inmates were forced to construct a second camp, later called Auschwitz II-Birkeneau. Most of the installations for the mass killing of Jews were built there. In 1942, a third camp was set up six kilometers from Auschwitz I. Called Auschvitz III-Monowitz. The camp authorities set up about 40 other sub-camps attached mainly to German industrial facilities especially in the vicinity of steelworks, mines, and factories, where prisoners were exploited as cheap labor.

Arrival at Auschwitz-Birkenau

It is already dark in the yard. An electric lamp shines in the distance, casting a faint light. The only strong illumination comes from a big flood light mounted above the gate, visible from far away. We stumble along the soggy, clayey ground, full of fear and exhaustion. We are approaching our new graves, as we call our new home. Before we even got to the new place, before we drew in a breath of air, some of us had our heads clubbed. Blood was already flowing from split heads or injured faces. This was the first welcome for newcomers. All of us are bewildered, looking around the place where we have been brought. Now Thaty inform us that this is a sample of camp life. Iron discipline reigns her. We are in the death camp. It is a lifeless island. A man does not come here to live but to die, sooner or later. There is no room for life here. It is the residence of death. Our brains are dulled, thoughts are numbed, this new language is impossible to grasp. Everyone is wondering where his family is. Where were they taken and how will they manage in the new conditions? Who knows how their terrified children will behave when they see how their mothers are mistreated? Who knows how these thugs will treat the sick, the weakened mothers, and the sisters they love? Who knows what human grave received their fathers and brothers, or what they are going through? They all stand helpless, full of anxiety, in despair, lonely, wretched, broken.

-From the notes of Jewish inmate, Zalmen Gradowski, found in the camp after the war.

First the men and the women are divided. Heartbreaking scenes of farewell. Husbands and wives are separated, mothers wave to their sons for the last time.

The lines of prisoners stand on the platform in ranks of five, several meters apart. If someone gives in to the pain of separation and runs up to the other line again, to give his hand to the one he loves, to whisper a few consoling words, a sharp blow from an SS man sends him staggering back. Now the SS doctor begins to segregate those who are fit for work, in his opinion, from those who are not. As a rule, mothers with little children are classed as not fit for work, as are those who look weak or sick. Wooden steps are brought to the back of the truck, and the ones the doctor selected as unfit for work have to get in . The SS men from the receiving unit count off everyone climbing the steps. Likewise they count all the ones fit for work, who have to start marching to the men's or women's camp. All the baggage must remain on the platform. The captives are told it will be taken later by truck. That is true, too, but none of the prisoners will ever see there property again.

-From the memoirs of SS Unterscharfuhrer (Corporal) Pery Broad

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Working the night shift for the first time, I had my first experience of how the transports arriving at Auschwitz were handled. A transport of Polish Jews came. They had not water in their wagons, and when they arrived there were about a hundred dead among them. The doors were flung open and we, shouting at these journey-worn, exhausted Jews, had to force them out of the wagons. The SS squad used truncheons to get them out of the cars quicker. They were put in fives. Empty the carriages of the dead, the half-dead, and the baggage, that was our job. The dead were thrown in one heap. All those who could not stand on their feet were regarded as dead. Parcels were piled up and the carriages had to be thoroughly cleaned. There could not be any traces left after the transport. Then a unit form the Political Department selected about 10% of the men and 5% of the women, who were led away and allotted to the camps according to the usual procedure. The others were loaded onto trucks. They were burned immediately in the forest. Often little children were thrown onto the trucks that were full of corpses. The parcels were trucked to the warehouse and there they were sorted.
-From the account of an Auschwitz escapee, the Jewish inmate, Rudolf Vrba

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When the Jewish transports unloaded on arrival, their luggage was left on the platform until all the Jews had been taken to the extermination buildings or into the camp.

Clothing and footwear were examined for hidden valuables and then stored or handed over to the camp to complete the inmates clothing. Later on, it was also sent to other camps. A considerable part of the clothing was passed to welfare organizations for resettlers and later for victims of air raids. Large and import munitions plants received considerable quantities for their foreign workers.

Blankets and mattresses, etc., were also sent to the welfare organizations. Insofar as the camp required articles of this nature, they were retained to complete their inventory, but other camps also received large consignments.

Valuables were taken over by a special section of the camp command and sorted out by experts. And a similar procedure was followed with the money that was found.

The jewelry was usually of great value, particularly if its Jewish owners came from the West; precious stones worth thousands of dollars, priceless gold and platinum watches set with diamonds, rings, earrings and necklaces of great rarity. Currency from all countries amounted to many thousands of dollars. Often tens and thousands of dollars in value, mostly in thousand dollar notes, were found on single individuals. Every possible hiding place in their clothes and luggage and on their bodies was made use of.

When the sorting process that followed each major operation had been completed, the valuables and money were packed into trunks and taken by lorry to the Economic

Administration Head Office in Berlin and then to the Reichsbank, where a special department dealt exclusively with items taken during action against the Jews. Eichmann told me on one occasion that the jewelry and currency were sold in Switzerland, and that the entire Swiss jewelry market was dominated by these sales.

-Rudolf Hoss, commandant of Auschwitz

The Fate of Those Selected for Extermination

Many of the women hid their babies among the piles of clothing. The men of the special detachment* were on the lookout for this, and would speak words of encouragement to the woman until they had persuaded her to take the child with her. The women believed that the disinfectant might be bad for their smaller children, hence their efforts to conceal them. The smaller children usually cried because of the strangeness of being undressed in this fashion, but when their mothers or members of the Special Detachment comforted them, they became calm and entered the gas chambers, playing or joking with one another and carrying their toys.

I noticed that women who either guessed or knew what awaited them nevertheless found the courage to joke with the children to encourage them, despite the mortal terror visible in their own eyes. One woman approached me as she walked past and, pointing to her four children who were manfully helping the smallest ones over the rough ground whispered: " How can could bring yourself to kill such darling children? Have you no heart at all?"

-From the autobiography of the commandant of Auschwitz, Rudolf Hoss

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The women went in first with their children, followed by the men, who were always fewer in number. This part of the operation nearly always went smoothly, for the prisoners of special detachment would calm those who betrayed any anxiety or who perhaps had some inkling of their fate. As an additional precaution, these prisoners of the special detachment and an SS man always remained in the chamber until the last moment. The door would now be quickly screwed up and the gas immediately discharged by the waiting disinfectors through vents in the ceilings of the gas chambers, down a shaft that led to the floor. This ensured the rapid distribution of the gas. It could be observed through the peep hole in the door that those who were standing nearest to the induction vents were killed at once. It can be said that about 1/3 died straightaway. The remainder staggered about and began to scream and struggle for air. The screaming however, soon changed into the death rattle and in a few minutes, all lay still. After twenty minutes, at the latest, no movements could be discerned. The time required for the gas to have effect varied according to the weather and depended on whether it was damp or dry, cold, or warm. It also depended

on the quality of the gas, which was never exactly the same, and on the composition of the transports, which might contain a high proportion of the healthy Jews or old, sick, or children. The victims became unconscious after a few minutes, according to their distance from the intake shaft. Those who screamed and those who were old or sick or weak or the small children, died quicker that those who were healthy or young.

The door was opened half and hour after the induction of the gas, and the ventilation switched on. Work was immediately begun on removing the corpses. . . .

The Special Detachment now set about removing the gold teeth and cutting the hair from the women. After this, the bodies were taken up by lift and laid in front of the ovens, which had meanwhile been stoked up.

-Rudolf Hoss, commandant of Auschwitz

Camp Life

They take us to the disinfection baths but no one gets washed. They only shave off our hair. . . We go into another room and get some kind of rags instead of our clothes. We came in dressed like human beings and came out in soggy rags. In these clothes we look like criminals or complete lunatics. Our heads are uncovered, with no hats or caps. One of us wears shoes, another is in slippers, generally mismatched or too big. Clothes too big or too small. And that is how we return as new inmates, how we fold into the family of camp dwellers. Our introduction to the new course of life in the camp, Only one thought has taken hold of all of us; one question won't leave us alone. How can we find out what happened to our families? How to get a sign from them that they are alive? How to locate some trace of them. . . We go into the barracks for registration.

-From the notes of the Jewish inmate Zalmen Gradowski, found in the camp after the war.

All the camp inmates have to work. . . Work starts after the morning roll call. In the summer from 5 a.m. to 12 noon and from 1p.m. to 6 p.m. and in the winter from 7 to 3 without a break. There are work places in the camp, for crafts, farm work, some industry; prisoners work in the coal mine, they do all of the office work for the camp administration, there is a hospital, a canteen, a laundry, slaughterhouse, etc. So prisoners with some kind of technical training can work in their trades. People who work with their heads have the hardest time finding suitable work because the number of these jobs is very limited, and 70-75% of all the prisoners are from the intelligentsia. So most of them work as unskilled laborers in the worst Kommandos, and that is why the mortality rate among them is so high. Another reason for it is that the camp authorities are driven to finish off this particular category of inmates.

-From the account of an Auschwitz escapee, the Polish political prisoner, Jeerzy Tabeau-Wesolowski

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Conditions in Birkenau were even less tolerable than in Auschwitz. Feet sink deep into the mire at every step. There was hardly any water for washing. The prisoners slept on three-tiered wooden bunks, six to a bunk, usually without straw pallets. The roll call held twice a day, meant standing for hours in the wet, cold, and mud. If it rained during the day, at night the prisoners had to lie on their planks in soaked clothes. No wonder that hundreds of them died every day.

-from the memoirs of SS Unterscharfuher Pery Broad

But then everything was much more difficult, harsher and more depressing for the women, since general living conditions in the women's camp were incomparably worse. They were far more tightly packed, and the sanitary and hygienic conditions were notably inferior. Furthermore the disastrous overcrowding and its consequences which existed from the very beginning, prevented any proper order being established in the women's camp.

The general congestion was far greater than in the men's camp. When the women had reached the bottom, they would let themselves go completely. They would then stumble about like ghosts. Without any will of their own, and had to be pushed everywhere by the others, until the day came when they quietly passed away. These stumbling corpses were a terrible sight.

-Rudof Hoss

The women at Birkenau, they were placed in barracks built as horse stables; the blocks were not divided by any partitions, there were no windows, only small frosted panes high up near the ceiling. Where the roof joined the walls, all around the block there were openings, very good for ventilating a stable, only not so suitable for people. Through those fell rain, snow, the wind howled. The women sleeping right next to the holes often woke up soaked through or covered with snow. Later I lived in a barrack like that myself, so I have a good idea of how it was. It is raining, for instance; the water pours not only through the openings around the sides, but also through the chronically leaking roofs. The blocks do not have floors, only clayey ground, so there is soft mud inside the blocks and you have to slog through it just as you do out in front of the block. Shoes are a rarity. Your wooden clogs get stuck and fall off again and again. The women usually wear old and worn-out Soviet uniforms, and kerchiefs on their shaven heads. The lucky ones have clogs, usually a few sizes too big, which chafe the feet horribly. Changes of underwear are almost never given, and when they are, they are old, dirty rags. At first there were no

drains and no water. Washing then was not a part of the camp's functions. The women washed in coffee or tea they got from other inmates, which they paid for with bread.
-From the account of an Auschwitz escapee, the political prisoner Jerzy Tabeau-Wesoloski

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After these preparations they were put in fives and led, first four at a time and then two, to the Black Wall, where the execution took place. The one who led them out was the Block 11kapo. The way he did it, he grabbed two of the condemned by the hands and ran with them out of the block, bringing them to the wall at his sides. First they had to kneel on one knee and bow their heads, then the execution took place with them standing., The executioner walked up to the ones prepared for their finish and put the gun to their heads at the spot where the spinal cord enters the skull. Then he carried out the execution. The weapon used for that purpose was a short air pistol. There was practically no sound from the shot. If death did not follow instantly, he fired one more. The execution was always attended by prisoners from the corpse carriers crew. After every double execution, they put the corpses into big crates and piled them up at the wall. And then spread sand over the blood stains. Afterwards, the place was ready for the next two.
-From the account of an Auschwitz escapee, the political prisoner Jerzy Tabeau-Wesoloski

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There was a public execution of 13 Polish engineers one day, in retaliation for an escape attempt. The execution was carried out in the yard in front of the inmate's kitchen, with the inmates in formation to watch. An iron rail was mounted on two poles. The ropes for hanging the victims turned out to be a little short. A fall from that height would not break the neck, so a quick death was impossible. A few minutes passes after the stools were pulled from under their legs, and still the victims' bodies were convulsing. Though Aumeir's opinion had been "let them kick a while longer." This time the thing had gone a little long even for him. The execution squad got the order, "Hang on to them!" The inmates standing nearby clenched their fists quietly, the death agonies of these revenge victims brought tears of rage to their eyes.

-From the memoirs of SS Unterscharfuher Pery Broad.

Comprehension Questions

1. How did the inmates arrive to Auschwitz-Birkenau?

2. What happened immediately after there arrival?

3. Which people were immediately sent to the gas chambers?

4. In the introduction it wa mentioned that those who arrived at the camps were either condemned to a qick death or a slow death. What were some of the things that killed those who were not immediately sent to the gas chambers?

5. Who was the commandant of Auschwitz?

Bonus research question- What happened to the man from the above question?

Essay/Critical thinking quetion

A Holocaust survivor oncesaid, "It was like they [the Nazis] were using the Jewish people to make a profit forGermany in every way possible." Why do you think she said this?

Lesson Three: Common people who made a difference, Heroes of the Holocaust in Poland and Hungary

Divide students into five groups. Have each group create a skit dramatizing the heroic deeds of one of the people listed below. The other students should take notes as each skit is being presented

Maximilian Kolbe, Polish Priest

In Auschwitz when a prisoner escaped, ten others were selected by the Nazis to die of starvation in retaliation. In one of these instances, one of the ten selected, Francis Gajowniczek, began crying out, "my wife, my children, I will never see them again!" Maximilian Kolbe, a Polish priest stepped forward and asked if he could die in his place. The Nazis granted his request. Forty one years later, Francis Gajowniczek was present when Rome formally named Kolbe a saint of the church.

Berthold Beitz, Oil Executive

The son of a wealthy Nazi-sympathizing family, Beitz was a 27 year old junior executive at Royal Dutch Shells Bumburg office when the war broke out. After the war broke out, he was named director of the Karpaten Oil company in Boryslaw, Poland. He soon found that while there was relatively little oil in the mountain region, there were a lot of Jews, almost 50% of the population. When death trains began running to Auschwitz and Treblinka, his conscience was stirred. He began to save Jews by hiring them. He said " I should have employed qualified personnel, instead, I chose tailors, hairdressers and scholars and gave them all cards as vital 'petroleum technicians.'" He and his wife also hid a Jewish child in their own home. When the Nazis fell, more than 800 of Beitz's Jews were still alive.

Irena Sendler, Social Worker

When Hitler built the Warsaw Ghetto in 1940 and herded 500,000 Polish Jews behind its walls, most of the Polish citizens turned their backs. Irena Sendler was a Warsaw social worker. She got a permit to enter the ghetto and check for signs of Typhus. She was shocked by what she saw and joined an underground group dedicated to helping Jews. The deportations had already begun and though she knew it was impossible to save adults, she began smuggling children out in an ambulance. She smuggled almost 2,500 Jewish children to safety and gave them temporary new identities. She organized a network of families to give sanctuary to the children, which was a difficult task considering anyone found harboring a Jew

could be shot on the spot. When the war had ended she began searching for the real parents but few had survived.

Raoul Wallenberg, Swiss Diplomat

As the Nazis arrived in Hungary in 1944 and began exporting Jews, several neutral countries began issuing Jews protective passports and the War Refugee Board in the United States asked Sweden to recommend someone to aid the Jews trapped in Budapest. Wallenberg was suggested and when he was asked if he would take on a humanitarian mission in Hungary, that might be dangerous, he agreed. Wallenberg sheltered Jews in buildings under the Swedish flag, and handed out Swedish passports which allowed the Jewish residents to escape from the country. As the Germans began retreating form Hungary toward the end of the war, forcing hundreds of Jews to walk to their deaths, Wallenberg organized rescue parties in trucks and compelled the Nazis to turn over their victims, claiming they were under the protection of Sweden, all the while handing out Swedish passes to those still without them. It is estimated that he saved over 100,000 lives and is considered by the Hungarians to be one of the greatest heroes of the war, and is remembered in history books as a great humanitarian. When the Soviets invaded, Wallenburg was imprisoned, and was never heard from again.

Janusz Korczak, Educator, Author

Korczak was a Polish-Jewish children's writer and educator. He had always been devoted to the education of children. He ran an orphanage in Warsaw. When the Nazis arrived, they ordered his orphanage be evacuated, and the children sent to the Warsaw Ghetto. Although he was offered refuge, he refused and instead choose to be with the children who needed him. In 1942, Korczak again had the opportunity to escape but instead chose to march with the children onto the train that they were told was taking them to 'resettlement in the east.' They arrived at Treblinka where he died one year before the Warsaw Ghetto uprising.

Wrap-up

1. Hold a discussion about the risks that these people took by saving lives. Many people ask how the citizens could sit by and do nothing as the Holocaust happened. Ask students what things average people could have done, and ask students whether they would have been willing to risk their lives in such ways to help others.
2. Assignment: Write a poem memorializing one of the heroes you learned about in the presentation of the skits.